

ALABAMA MINING MUSEUM,

WYATT SCHOOL

Birmingham Industrial District

Between US 78 & Burlington Northern Railroad

Dora

Walker County

Alabama

HABS No. AL-978-B

HABS

ALA

64-DORA,

2B-

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey

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HABS  
ALA  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
ALABAMA MINING MUSEUM, WYATT SCHOOL

HABS No. AL-978-B

Location: Between US 78 & Burlington Northern Railroad,  
Dora, Walker County, Alabama

UTM: 16.491635.37322222

Present Owner/  
Occupant: Alabama Mining Museum

Present Use: Historical interpretation and education

Significance: Wyatt Elementary is an example of an early 20th century one-teacher school that was once typical of locally supported, church-based efforts to educate African-Americans in this coal mining area, and throughout rural Alabama.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: c. 1908
2. Architect: unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: unknown (c. 1908-1916); Walker County Young Ministers Baptist Christian Association (1916-1925); State of Alabama and Walker County School Board (1925-1965); Walker County 6 Point Association (1965-1990); Alabama Mining Museum (1990 - present).
4. Original and subsequent occupants: Built in 1908, it was operated until 1925 by the still-existing Walker County Young Ministers Baptist Christian Association. From 1925 to 1964 it was operated by the State of Alabama and the Walker County Board of Education. This one-room, frame school became a popular night spot in the 1960s and 1970s. Since 1990 the Alabama Mining Museum in Dora has operated the school building as an interpretive center.
5. Builder, contractor, suppliers:  
Built of salvaged lumber.

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6. Original plans and construction: The Boyd House, a "big...two-story house with lightening rods on each side," was originally located at Drummond Switch on the Empire Road between Sumiton and Empire, about 10 miles northwest of Wyatt. Boyd family member Gladys Alexander describes the circumstances for the sale of the property: "They sold Grandmom's house and they went up there and tore it down and made their schoolhouse."
7. Alterations and additions: During the late 1960s or 1970s, when the school building was used as a popular spot for evening entertainment, a second exterior door was cut and second set of steps constructed on the northern end of this schoolhouse.<sup>1</sup>

In 1990 the Alabama Mining Museum moved the schoolhouse to its current location on the museum grounds. Guthrie House Moving of Nauvoo, Walker County braced the then fairly dilapidated structure and conducted the move. The exterior brace remains at the southern end of the schoolhouse. Ray Roberts, a carpenter employed by the Alabama Mining Museum, handled the rehabilitation, building the current brick piers and wooden steps, and putting on a new shingled roof. Mr. Stough, a contractor from Fayette in nearby Winston County, located tongue-in-grove ceiling material from another area school. This material was used to patch the original ceiling. Roberts also repaired the chimney rebuilding the base and the top, the central portion having remained intact during the move.<sup>2</sup>

Inside the school, the original blackboard at the front of the school and the book locker at the rear remain intact. The schools desks, now located in the schoolhouse, came from an antiques place in Homewood. These desks were used in Jefferson County schools. The current Atlanta Stove Works stove is a replacement for the last one in use. This stove came from a Jasper dealer. The stove jacket does not remain from earlier use and as one former teacher pointed out the stove would be dangerous if used in a classroom situation. The current globe-type lights, known as "schoolhouse" lights in Alabama parlance, came from the old Ford Motor Company showroom in Dora. The original lights

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<sup>1</sup>Dorothy Jordan Smith, Interview with author, 24 September 1994.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Lovelady, Interviews. 1 May 1994, 16 January 1995.

were single bulbs on strings centered front to back within the interior space.<sup>3</sup>

Heating and air-conditioning vents, now located in the stage floor, and the heat pump located at the northern end of the school exterior, were added in 1994.

B. Historical Context:

Introduction: This history tells the story of a one-teacher rural Alabama schoolhouse built in 1908 in the coal fields northwest of Birmingham. A black church group purchased the materials and the land on which they built their schoolhouse. Their story is told within the context of the development of mines and mining communities and of the educational opportunities for black southerners in the greater Birmingham area during early years of the 20th century. Here, rapid industrialization created the South's largest industrial workplace. Industrialization brought new, and harsh, job opportunities, but also provided new and better educational opportunities.

The story of the Wyatt School contributes new information to the understanding of the black experience in the industrial communities surrounding Birmingham, experience that most likely differ significantly from that of blacks in other southern areas.

Mining and Community Development in the Dora Area

Old Dora was on up the highway...above the commissary...different parts...a mining part on one map, a mining part another way, but all of it was Dora.

- Corene Davenport Jordan

The historic communities of Wyatt and Burnwell are now part of Dora, a commercial hub of eastern Walker County, Alabama. Dora is located approximately 30 miles northwest of Birmingham and 15 miles southeast of the county seat at Jasper. Walker County was settled by farmers and coal prospectors beginning in the early 19th century. Farming became the principal antebellum industry although coal was also mined from the Warrior Field and floated by flatboat down the Warrior River for sale at Tuscaloosa, Demopolis,

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<sup>3</sup>Richard Lovelady, Interview with author, 1 May 1994;  
Richard Lovelady, *History of Wyatt School*, Typescript, Alabama Mining Museum, 1990.

and Mobile.<sup>4</sup> Coal mining intensified in 1886 when the Kansas City, Memphis, and Birmingham Railroad extended a rail line into the area and built a depot along the line at a site that became Dora.<sup>5</sup> About the depot a business district grew to service coal miners working at the mines, coke ovens, and company-built camps that soon opened in the neighboring hills and hollows.<sup>6</sup> The town of Dora, with its single street running between the railroad and its stores, incorporated on January 18, 1897.<sup>7</sup> A permanent post office was established at Dora in 1902. By the 1910s scores of frame and brick buildings along Dora's main street witnessed its success as a mining boomtown and railroad distribution center. As miners and their families prospered and moved out of company camps, they, and others attracted to the area to provide services for the thriving mines, built residences near the commercial core. The Georgia Pacific (later Southern) Railroad, which eventually extended from Richmond, Virginia to the Mississippi River, also extended a line into this area passing through Day's Gap (now Oakman) by 1884, then to Parrish and Cordova, and to the south of Dora by 1886. The Southern and the Kansas City, Memphis, and Birmingham lines crossed to the south of Dora. At their crossing two settlements -- Wyatt and Burnwell grew.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>John Martin Dombhart, *History of Walker County, Its Towns and People* (Thornton, Arkansas: Cayce Publishing Company, 1989) 1-21; Ethel Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama*, 1910 (Reprint, Birmingham, Alabama: The BookKeepers Press, 1972) 52-57.

<sup>5</sup>The Kansas City, Memphis, and Birmingham Railroad, the main line from Birmingham to St. Louis, was later called the Frisco, and is now part of the Burlington Northern system.

<sup>6</sup>*Dora Centennial 1886-1986 Scrapbook of Memories* (Dora, Alabama: City of Dora, 1986) 1-4; John Dombhart, *History of Walker County, Its Towns and People*, 33. Dombhart credits the entrepreneurial Walter Moore of Jefferson County with organizing the coal companies and mining operations along the Kansas City, Memphis and Birmingham Railroad in and about Dora.

<sup>7</sup>Incorporation records underscore the importance of the railroads to the development of the community. Dora's corporate limits extended "within the space of one half mile east and west and half mile wide, the Kansas City, Memphis, and Birmingham Railroad Company's depot in said town as the centre." quoted in *Dora Centennial 1886-1986 Scrapbook of Memories*, 4.

<sup>8</sup>John Martin Dombhart, *History of Walker County Alabama*, 47, 84. Richard Lovelady, Interview with author, 24 September 1994. The Southern is now part of the Norfolk Southern system.

From the 1880s through the 1920s coal mining and cokemaking in the Dora area boomed. In addition to mines at Burnwell and at Yerkwood, the Dora Nos. 1-15, Samorset, Red Star, Piedmont, Magella, Kershaw Hollow, Old Dora, Pond Hollow, Summit, Frisco Central, Commercial, Ivy Leaf, and Clipper mines operated nearby. Companies operating these mines included the Sloss Furnace (later Sloss-Sheffield Iron and Steel) Company, Ivy Coal and Coke Company, Red Star Coal Company, Dora Coal Mining Company, black Diamond Coal Company, and Burnwell Mining Company. Also mining in this area were several other large Birmingham-based coal firms, organized as mergers of many coal firms, Pratt Consolidated Coal Company, organized in 1899 by Erskine Ramsay and George McCormick, and Alabama By-Products Corporation (ABC), organized in 1920 with the holdings of Pratt Consolidated as its principal unit. In the 1880s and 1890s these firms built and operated hundreds of beehive coke ovens at many mine sites. DeBardeleben Coal Company of Birmingham and Corona Coal Company of Jasper were two other large area operators.<sup>9</sup>

Walker County steam coal was sold to the railroads and home users. Coal and coke, the fuel for making iron and steel, were also sold to Birmingham area furnace companies, particularly the Sloss company with its furnaces in Birmingham and North Birmingham. Sloss and other furnace companies later built beehive and by-product coke ovens at their furnace sites. In the early years coal was coked at the mines. After the opening of the Warrior River to year-round navigation in the 1910s, transport of coal down the river increased. Substantial quantities of Walker County coal was coked to fuel the furnaces of the Central Iron and Coal Co. foundry at Holt, just north of Tuscaloosa.<sup>10</sup>

Railroads were the principal transporters of goods and people. Railroads supplied the early mines, mining camps, and other communities in this then rural and remote area. Railroads also served as public transportation for folks

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<sup>9</sup>*State of Alabama Mine Inspection Reports* (Birmingham, AL: 1892-1940); Marjorie L. White, *The Birmingham District-An Industrial History and Guide* (Birmingham, AL: Birmingham Historical Society, 1981) 52. For a general discussion of the development of railroads and mines in Walker County during the 1880s, see Ethel Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama*, 502-503 or Milton Fies, "A Man with a Light on his Cap-Being a Brief Chronicle of Coal Mining in Walker County: 1912-1960. In Carl Elliott, ed. *Annals of Northwest Alabama*, III (Jasper, AL: 1979).

<sup>10</sup>McWane Cast Iron Pipe Company of Birmingham still operates the early 20th century coke by-products plant of the Central Iron and Coal Co. foundry at Holt.

going to school as well as to work. Until the late 1930s, Walker County's 804 square mile area had few paved roads. Then, thanks to longtime area Congressman and U.S. Senator John Hollis Bankhead, Sr. from Jasper, Walker County gained one major road, the Bankhead Highway, the nation's second transcontinental highway which extended from Washington D.C. to San Diego via Birmingham and Walker County. Bankhead became widely known as the "Father of Good Roads" for his support of the nation's earliest federal highway construction in the U.S. Congress. Today U.S. Highway 78 remains the county's major road. This two and four lane highway links Walker County to Birmingham and to Memphis.<sup>11</sup> A major highway, which will become part of the federal interstate system and link Birmingham to Memphis, is currently under construction to alleviate traffic congestion on U.S. 78.

Most everyone in the Dora area worked in coal mining from the 1880s until 1950. By the early 1950s railroads, then major users of Walker County coal, had converted to diesel engines. Other markets for steam coal also declined. As early as 1931 the Alabama coal fields, located close to the newly opened Louisiana gas fields, became the first coal fields in the nation to feel the effect of competition from natural gas. Many sugar refineries, cotton mills, power plants, and other heavy users of steam coal from Walker County mines switched to natural gas.<sup>12</sup> As the big mines closed, large numbers of people left this area or sought employment in other fields. Those miners who remained opened small "wagon" or "truck" mines or went to work for ABC or Drummond. The Jasper-based Drummond Company, Inc., organized in 1935 by H. E. Drummond of Walker County, acquired ABC in 1977 and continues to mine in Walker County and other nearby counties. In 1992 Drummond Company Inc. was

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<sup>11</sup>State of Alabama Highway Department Map of Walker County, State of Alabama Department of Transportation Files, Montgomery, Late 1930s. This map shows the dominance of the railroads and lack of roads. At this time people in Walker County rode the trains to work, to shop, and to school. Bankhead's role in the development of a national highway system is discussed in the U. S. *Good Roads Bulletin*, December 1920 and January 1927. Biographical summaries about U.S. Congressman and Senator John Hollis Bankhead, Sr. (1842-1920) are found in Thomas McAdory Owen, *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography* (Chicago, IL: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1921) 88-92; Allen Johnson, *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1936) 577; *Who's Who in America I*, 1903, 69.

<sup>12</sup>Milton Fies, *The Man with a Light on His Cap*, 73.

listed in the top 20 national coal producers, and Walker County appeared as a top 10 national coal producer among counties.<sup>13</sup>

Today, many Dora citizens work in Jasper and Birmingham. Those who mine coal commute to highly automated strip and underground mines now located in other areas of Walker, Jefferson, and Tuscaloosa counties. While Alabama's coal production has doubled in the past 40 years, employment has decreased from 14,000 to 4,000.<sup>14</sup> Today the majority of coal mined in Walker County is used for power generation, much of it at Alabama Power Company's Gorgas and Miller steam plants, both located within 10 miles of Dora along the Warrior River.

Dora's commercial activity has moved from its historic heart at the Frisco depot to the Bankhead Highway, U.S. 78. The depot burned and has not been replaced. "Old Dora's" Main Street is now a ghost town of abandoned buildings, flanked at either end by historic residences and trailer homes which likewise dot the surrounding hills and hollows of today's greater Dora. Memories and artifacts of coal mining heritage are preserved in the former high school gymnasium which local citizens converted to the Alabama Mining Museum in 1984.<sup>15</sup> In 1990 mining museum boosters moved the one-teacher Wyatt School to the museum grounds for continued use as an educational resource.

Development of the Wyatt and Burnwell Communities, now part of Dora

Today's Wyatt and Burnwell communities developed as flagstops on the two railroads that cross here. A spur from the Southern Railroad serviced the historic Burnwell Mines, while the Frisco mainline served Wyatt. The Burnwell community was named for the mines, the Wyatt community for

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<sup>13</sup>Martha Tuggle, "Mining in Dora" In *Scrapbook of Memories*, 43-56; Richard Lovelady, Interviews, 1 May 1994, 24 September 1994. *Keystone Coal Industry Manual* (Chicago, IL: Maclean Hunter Publishing, Company, 1993).

<sup>14</sup>*Annual Statistical Report Division of Safety and Inspection, Fiscal Year 1941-42*, Department of Industrial Relations; *Keystone Coal Industry Manual*, 1993.

<sup>15</sup>*Dora Centennial*, 254.



the Wyatt family. Residents still call the area by both names even though it is now part of Dora.<sup>16</sup>

In 1906 the Burnwell Coal Company of Birmingham opened the Burnwell Mine on a spur of the Southern Railway. In the following year this drift and slope mine under the supervision of Charles J. Hager produced 151,866 tons of coal.<sup>17</sup> This coal was mined from the Mary Lee Seam which averaged five feet in height at this point. By 1912 an average of 70 miners worked the Burnwell Mine.<sup>18</sup> The mine continued to operate through 1921. This year appears to be one of labor unrest and general depression in the Alabama coal mining industry.<sup>19</sup>

Mining at Yerkwood began in 1923 and continued until 1928, the year the State of Alabama discontinued the leasing of state convicts to industrial corporations. The Pratt Fuel Corporation of Birmingham operated this mine, and others in the area which included Samorset, Disney, Dora 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7, Jagger, Marietta, Red Star, and Bankhead in 1925. Yerkwood was a convict mine. According to local sources, a dormitory for convicts working the mine was located in this community until recent years.<sup>20</sup> Area mines operating in the

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<sup>16</sup>Richard Lovelady, Interview, 1 May 1994. A flagstop is a place you can buy a ticket for a train.

<sup>17</sup>The Hager family provided several generations of leadership to Birmingham area mining operations. Interestingly, Corene and Dorothy Davenport's mother worked for the Hager family in later years when Hager superintended other mines at Dora. Mining engineer John Hager, brother to Charles, contributed greatly to the research for *The Birmingham District-An Industrial History and Guide* published in 1981.

<sup>18</sup>Annual Report of Coal Mines State of Alabama, 1912. In this year, the annual report provides a detailed verbal description of the operation of the mine.

<sup>19</sup>Report of Inspector of Alabama Coal Mines Showing the Location of Mines, Character, Production, Employees for the Years 1906, 1907, 1908, 1909; Annual Reports of Coal Mines State of Alabama, 1910-1921; Map Showing Location of Mines in Operation by Alabama Coal Operators, 1907, Alabama Mining Museum Collection, Dora, AL.

<sup>20</sup>Annual Report of Coal Mines State of Alabama, 1923-1928; Richard Lovelady, Interview, 1 May 1994; Birmingham City Directories include listings for the Birmingham-based coal firm Pratt Fuel Corporation from 1924 to 1933, with Walter Moore serving as president and Person Moore as vice president during these years.

1930s, 1940s, and 1950s included Hull, Samorset, Flat Creek, and Praco, the latter two located several miles to the southeast in Jefferson County. Area residents worked at these operations.

At one time the Burnwell community had two stores, three churches, a post office, and two schools (the Dawson and Wyatt elementaries). The Ezekiel Morgan family had filed claim to land in this area in 1831 and farmed and initiated coal mining here in the 1840s.<sup>21</sup> The Brasfield family also held large acreage here at the turn of the century. Today the community includes scattered residences, the Shiloh Baptist Church, the Wyatt Church, and a wooden trestle bridge over the Southern (now Norfolk Southern) Railroad. The Yerkwood community, located on "Yerkwood Hill," also includes scattered residences, former company-built houses, a store built of the locally manufactured "Cordova brick" and St. Joseph's Baptist Church.<sup>22</sup>

#### Walker County Schools -- An Overview

Today the Walker County School Board operates 23 schools for 9,200 students. Until 1964, the county board operated two sets of schools for the black and white children of the county. The number and size of these schools varied annually, evidently responding to the changing demographics in the mining communities in which they were located. In 1934, the board operated 124 schools for approximately 15,000 students. Six years later it operated 98 schools, some of them enlarged facilities constructed with federal government assistance. These school buildings served approximately the same number of students. Since 1940 the black school-age population in the county has remained relatively constant, but the white population has continuously decreased. In 1940 Wyatt Elementary was one of 20 "colored schools" that served 1,645 of the county's students. These Walker County schools included Aldridge, Argo, Bankhead, Backwater, Coal Valley, Cordova, Corona, Dora, Empire, Flat Creek, Gorgas, Manchester, Oakman, Parrish, Sipsey, Townley, Walker County Training School (a high school located in Jasper), and Wyatt. The largest black school-age populations in the county were located at the large mining communities of Sipsey and Corona. Eight of the

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<sup>21</sup>*Dora Centennial*, 16-20; Richard Lovelady is a great-great grandson of Ezekiel Morgan.

<sup>22</sup>Richard Lovelady, Interview, 1 May 1994; Field Visit with Richard Lovelady, 1 May 1994.

schools listed in 1940 were one-teacher schools. Closed in 1964, few of these schools remain today.<sup>23</sup>

#### Development of Schools in Dora

In 1889 the first school, a log school called "Hard Bargain School," was built in the Dora area. Sam Sellers built it with the assistance of a tramp who knew how to build chimneys. School sessions began when Dr. Daniel M. Davis, who attended Southern Medical College in Atlanta, Georgia, returned home and served as the first teacher.<sup>24</sup>

In 1903 a new two-story frame school opened in Dora. By 1921, a red brick schoolhouse replaced this frame school and served white students in grades 1 to 11. In 1925 Grade 12 was added and in 1926 the State of Alabama accredited this Dora school. In 1935 a new brick junior and senior high school opened and the 1921 school became the elementary school serving grades 1-6.<sup>25</sup> While both of these structures later burned, the 1939 Dora gymnasium and the Watkins Field entrance and stadium seats built of local stone by local men with federal funds, became property of the Alabama Mining

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<sup>23</sup>Due to fires at the Walker County Courthouse, school board records prior to 1932 do not exist. Walker County School Board Minute Books, 25 September 1934; Ruth Teaford, *Daily Mountain Eagle*, 24 February 1983. Milton Fies, *A Man with a Light on His Cap*, 38-39. According to Richard Lovelady, a one-room schoolhouse may remain at Thatch on Highway 95, 10 miles north of Jasper.

<sup>24</sup>*Dora Centennial*, 3 and 11. D. M. Davis received a certificate "to teach in any of the Public Schools of Walker County" on July 7, 1888. After teaching in Walker County he continued his own education at the Bellevue School of Medicine in New York in 1893 and later opened practice as a company and private practice physician in Walker County.

<sup>25</sup>Mr. Charles M. McCalley, a Birmingham architect trained at the University of Illinois and listed in *Walker County School Board Record* as "Architect for the Federal loan," prepared preliminary data, sketches, plans, and maps "as approved by P.W.A." for the school in Dora, one of seven school construction projects McCalley was working on in Walker County at this time. *Walker County School Board Minutes*, 25 September 1933, 23 July 1934, and 30 December 1934. McCalley may have been the architect for the Dora gymnasium and Watkins Field which remain today on the grounds of the Alabama Mining Museum. If this possibility proves correct, the successor firm to McCalley's practice may have the plans for the school, field, gymnasium, and site in their Birmingham office.

Museum in 1984.<sup>26</sup> The museum's principal collections and activities are located in the gymnasium.

According to longtime Dora resident Gladys Alexander who attended schools in the Wyatt-Burnwell area in the early years of the century, the white schools at the mining communities of Wyatt, Dolisky, and Red Star were all located in churches. Church-supported education was evidently common in the area at this time. The first formal white schoolhouse not located in a church in the Wyatt-Burnwell area was the three-room Dawson School completed "by the county" in 1918. It contained grades one to seven.<sup>27</sup> In other mining communities, particularly those run by larger operators, the companies often built schools for both black and white students and contributed to their operations.

Black students living in the Dora area attended schools located in Union Camp and at Wyatt.<sup>28</sup> Until 1963 when T.S. Boyd School opened, black students in the Dora area attended Dora Colored High School.<sup>29</sup> Prior to its opening, students seeking a high school education commuted or moved to Jasper. Future educators Corene Davenport Jordan and Dorothy Davenport Pope paid \$6.00 a month for train fare to ride to Jasper from Union Camp. They eventually lived with a cousin in Jasper so that they could attend high school there.<sup>30</sup> In 1965 T. S. Boyd became the elementary school (Grades K-6) for all Dora children. A new high school (Grades 7-12) was

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<sup>26</sup>*Dora Centennial*, 207 and 254. Watkins Field was named for Samuel J. Watkins, Mayor of Dora at the time of the field's construction.

<sup>27</sup>Gladys Alexander, Interview with author and Richard Lovelady, 19 November 1994.

<sup>28</sup>Unions successfully organized in Walker County in 1933. Black miners who had been thrown out of company houses, in order to assure they would not be evicted from company houses again, built their own houses in a community that is still known as "Union Camp." *Dora Centennial*, 83.

<sup>29</sup>T. S. Boyd School is named for Terrell S. Boyd (d. 1959), son of Jack Boyd of Drummond Switch, who served as Dora city councilman and Walker County commissioner and member of the board of education. Boyd's wife Dora and other family members taught school for many years in the Dora area. James Lee Boyd first entered government land in Walker County in 1833. John Martin Dombhart, *History of Walker County Alabama*, 78.

<sup>30</sup>Dorothy Davenport Pope, Interview with author, 8 September 1994.

completed in 1969 and continues to serve all students attending public high school in the Dora area.<sup>31</sup>

#### Secondary Education for Blacks in early 20th Century Alabama

Support by black churches in Alabama for elementary education was not uncommon in the early years of this century. Many churches such as the Shiloh Church at Burnwell, and associations of these churches, such as the Walker County Young Ministers Baptist Christian Association, formed "to promote education and missions," organized academies and supported schools until the State of Alabama fully financed education for black students. As late as 1950 many county schools in the state were conducted as church-supported academies. In research done in the 1970s, Birmingham historian Dr. Charles Brown documented 30 such academies which became spring boards for expansion of county education for blacks in Alabama. According to Reverend Wilson Fallin, church-support of education is typical of the black experience in the South.<sup>32</sup>

Supporting educational opportunities for blacks in Alabama was an interesting proposition in the early years of this century. The state's "Great Education Governor," Braxton Bragg Comer (1907-1911), had assessed property statewide to provide taxes for improvement of education at all levels and for all citizens. Comer's program proposed the construction of rural schools for black and whites throughout the state. Comer's position conflicted with general social norms and with the Alabama Constitution of 1901 which had disfranchised black voters by requiring education as a prerequisite to voting. The state had provided little financial support for education of blacks, or whites at the elementary school level.<sup>33</sup> Until the late 1910s the entire states of Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Louisiana had not constructed high schools for blacks,

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<sup>31</sup> *Dora Centennial*, 81-83.

<sup>32</sup> Rev. Wilson Fallin, Telephone interview with author, 3 November 1994. Reverend Fallin is President of the Birmingham Baptist Bible College and a historian of the African American church in the Birmingham area. He is currently completing a doctoral dissertation on this subject at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.

<sup>33</sup> Braxton Bragg Comer, *Alabama Governor (1907-1911)* Administrative files, State of Alabama Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Montgomery, AL; Marie Bankhead Owen, *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Biography* (Chicago, IL: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Co.: 1921) 15-21.

although the black student population of these states exceeded 50 percent of the total school-age population.<sup>34</sup>

Despite these prevailing attitudes, Birmingham and Birmingham area industrial corporations, especially the Tennessee, Coal and Iron Company (TCI), the area subsidiary of U.S. Steel, and the DeBardeleben and Corona coal companies in Walker County, strongly supported education for black students. From 1884 to 1887 the Birmingham school system built the same schools for black and white students, thereby greatly increasing attendance at schools. In 1900 the Birmingham school board under the leadership of its Superintendent John Herbert Phillips and Board Chairman Samuel Ullman had established a high school for blacks in Birmingham's Smithfield community. Opened in the fall of 1900, this school, known as Industrial High School and later Parker High School, became the largest black high school in the South and served as a training ground for black educators and leaders. Whether Parker High School and other Birmingham area schools had any bearing on the church supported efforts to educate black students in the Burnwell area of Walker County is not known. However, many Parker High School students lived and worked in Walker County. Parker-trained teacher Corene Davenport Jordan taught in the Wyatt School for 11 years.<sup>35</sup>

At least two large coal firms with operations in Walker County -- Debardeleben and Corona Coal -- supported education for black miners' children during the early 20th century. At the time of construction of the Sipsey mining camp in 1913, DeBardeleben Coal constructed school buildings for both blacks and whites. The company supplemented the salaries paid the teachers by the county and extended the school year to a nine month term by 1913. Robert W. Taylor, long-time principal of "the Negro school at Sipsey," had graduated from Tuskegee and Harvard University and served

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<sup>34</sup>Carl Harris, "Stability and Change in Discrimination Against Black Public Schools: Birmingham, 1871-1931," *Journal of Southern History* I, August 1985, 403; James D. Anderson, *Education of Blacks in the South: 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill and London:1988) 80-82.

<sup>35</sup>Arthur Harold Parker, *A Dream that Came True: Autobiography of A. H. Parker*; Marlene Rikard, *George Gordon Crawford-Man of the New South*, Unpublished Masters Thesis, Samford University, 1971; Corene Jordan, Interview with Lillie Fincher, 24 September 1994; Margaret E. Armbruster, "Samuel Ullman: Birmingham Progressive," *The Alabama Review*, January 1994, 30-43; Margaret E. Armbruster, *Samuel Ullman and 'Youth': The Life, The Legacy* (Tuscaloosa and London, 1993).

as financial secretary to Booker T. Washington before coming to Walker County.<sup>36</sup>

Tuskegee Institute, founded in 1882 at Tuskegee, Alabama, located to the south of Birmingham, and led by the legendary educator Booker T. Washington, may also have played various roles in the advancement of education for blacks in Walker County including the educating of teachers and administrators and other professionals and skilled craftsmen. In 1892 Washington established Alabama's first program in mechanical and architectural drawing, a program that later educated future architects and skilled craftsmen who became prominent in design and construction industries at Tuskegee and throughout the South and the nation. The architecture faculty at Tuskegee Institute provided planning and design assistance to other black churches, schools and communities. Many faculty members and students left Tuskegee to set up private practice.<sup>37</sup>

Miles College in Birmingham's industrial community of Fairfield probably also supported educational efforts in area industrial communities. By 1902 in the community of Booker City (later the site of TCI's Docena coal mines), a black community organized around educational training facilities known as the Booker City and Booker City High School. The Colored Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church in Alabama exchanged this site at Booker City for land at Vinesville (now Fairfield and the location of U.S. Steel's major plants in the Birmingham area since 1909). In 1907 the church group opened a reorganized school, known to this day as Miles Memorial College. Miles became the one school supported by the CME conferences of Alabama. The early 20th century buildings of the Miles College campus, constructed during the administration of James Bray (1907-1910), a graduate of Paine College who was most successful in attracting the financial resources of the Board of Education

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<sup>36</sup>Milton Fies writing in "A Man with a Light on his Cap" in 1960 described the DeBardleben company support for education at Sipsey, 38-39, 45. Fies lived at Sipsey and managed DeBardleben's operations in Walker County for 45 years. He and Walker County coal magnate Lysurgus Breckenridge Musgrove served on the school board in the 1920s. According to Fies, Musgrove's Corona School at Patton Junction was the largest school for Black students in the county at this time. The school at Sipsey was the second largest.

<sup>37</sup>Richard Kevin Dozier, *Booker T. Washington's Contribution to the Education of Black Architects*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: U M I Dissertation Services, 1993 (Doctoral Dissertation, 1990), 47, 53-54, 173-174.

of New York, were recently listed on the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>38</sup>

#### Brief History of the Wyatt School

Wyatt School was the first schoolhouse built to educate the black children in the Burnwell area. The opening of the Burnwell Mines in 1906 provided new jobs to area residents or those attracted to the area to find employment. Prior to construction of the school building in 1908, children received lessons at the Shiloh Church which remains in the community to this day.<sup>39</sup>

The Wyatt School was built for and operated by the Walker County Young Minister's Baptist Christian Association until 1925. The school served students in the Burnwell and Yerkwood communities.<sup>40</sup> A former student indicated that the early school included grades one to eight.<sup>41</sup> School board records from 1940 to 1960 record 23 to 43 students who attended grades one to six at Wyatt.<sup>42</sup>

According to Candice Harris Green who attended the school in 1908, the Wyatt school was built by a man identified only as

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<sup>38</sup>Othall Hawthorne Lakey, *The History of the CME Church*, Memphis: CME Publishing Co., 1985, 462-464; Marjorie L. White, *The Birmingham District-An Industrial History and Guide*, 256-257.

<sup>39</sup>Candice Harris Green, Interview with Richard Lovelady, 1990. Richard Lovelady spoke with this Dora native in 1990 when the Chicago resident and eldest known living student to have attended Wyatt School, was 93. Mrs Green was a sixth or seventh grade student at Wyatt during the first year of the operation of the new schoolhouse. Other records documenting the construction of the schoolhouse have not been located. Unfortunately, when Shiloh Baptist Church burned, its early records also burned. John Lewis Parker, Interview with author, 19 November 1994.

<sup>40</sup>Richard Lovelady, Interview, 1 May 1994: John Lewis Parker, Interview with the author and Richard Lovelady, 19 November 1994, Walker County Young Ministers Baptist Christian Association to State of Alabama, Warranty Deed, Walker County Courthouse, Jasper, AL, Book 275, 415, 23 May 1925.

<sup>41</sup>Candice Harris Green, Interview with Richard Lovelady, 1990.

<sup>42</sup>*Walker County School Enrollment*, Walker County Board of Education Files, Walker County School Board Office, Jasper, AL, 1979. In 1940, 23 students were enrolled at Wyatt Elementary in grades 1-6. In 1945, 27 students were enrolled; in 1950, 30 students; in 1955, 43 students; and in 1960, 42 students.



a "wealthy white man."<sup>43</sup> Who this white man was and what his role was remain a mystery. The 1908 construction date appears probable, but has not been verified by other sources. What is known is that the Walker County Young Ministers Christian Association purchased the 15-acre school site in 1916 for \$100.00 from William H. Brasfield, a large land owner in the area and that the materials with which the school was built was purchased from Jack Boyd's widow, Willie Ann Boyd Sumner, sometime after 1900.<sup>44</sup>

They sold the house to the colored people...Grandpa Jack was a farmer. A man shot him when he tried to break up a fight...two men a grumbling over land." The house was sufficiently large for his widow to take in boarders to help make ends meet and support her little children. The boarders were other men working on the railroad then under construction to mines (which became the Empire mines) opening in the formerly agricultural area. Willie Ann Boyd sold the Boyd family residence after she remarried widower Alex Sumner and moved with her young children to the Dora area.<sup>45</sup>

The names of the individuals who constructed the schoolhouse remain unknown as does the origin of the design for the schoolhouse, a design then typical of early 20th century one-teacher schoolhouses in southern rural areas.<sup>46</sup> This

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<sup>43</sup>Candice Harris Green, Interview with Richard Lovelady, 1990.

<sup>44</sup>William H. Brasfield to Walker County Young Ministers Christian Association, Deed, Walker County Courthouse, Birmingham, AL, Book 175, 619, 1 April 1916; Gladys Alexander, Interview, 19 November 1994.

<sup>45</sup>Gladys Alexander, Interview, 19 November 1994. Following this analysis, the construction date of the schoolhouse must be after Jack Boyd's death in 1900 and his widow's remarriage in 1904.

According to the state mine inspection report, the Empire mine was first listed in 1900. Jack Boyd's tombstone in the cemetery associated with the Good Hope Baptist Church in the nearby mining community of West Sayre lists his birth and death dates as 1859-1900. Jack Boyd died at age 41. His wife Willie Ann Boyd Sumner (1856-1941) outlived him by 41 years. Willie Ann's second marriage to Alex Sumner took place in 1904. Certificate of Marriage. Marriage License Book 348, Walker County Courthouse, Jasper, AL. 1904.

<sup>46</sup>Walker County School Board records do not begin until 1932, due to fires at the county courthouse. State of Alabama educational records nor the papers of Gov. Braxton Bragg Comer, a

design exemplifies many of the preferred conditions for this type of rural structure as described by educational authority Fletcher B. Dresslar of the Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville.<sup>47</sup>

The major axis of the rectangular schoolhouse was oriented north/south with the primary entrance at the southern end of the west (rear) facade.<sup>48</sup> Five double-hung windows dominated a large section of the west (side) facade. These windows, according to Dresslar, addressed the "fundamental demands of health" by providing "the purification of the classroom by direct sunlight." For this purpose, either an eastern or western exposure was the preferred orientation. Such an orientation allowed not only ample direct sunlight, "the most powerful and reliable disinfectant known," but also assisted in warming the classroom space. The large windows also offered the teacher excellent vision to supervise the exterior play area. Two smaller windows were placed above eye level on the east facade to allow for cross-ventilation of the classroom, while limiting visual distractions to the students.

The south facade of the schoolhouse had two large, centrally placed double-hung windows to provide light and ventilation into the cloakroom which, together with the small entrance foyer, occupied the full width of the south end of the school. An interior wall approximately five feet from this facade, separated the cloakroom from the classroom and contains built-in book shelves and storage cabinets as well as an enclosed chimney for the coal-burning stove at the back of the room.

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strong advocate for expansion of educational opportunities for the rural areas, have not been consulted. What the state's role in providing maintenance funds, teaching materials, or teachers to the school's operation in the years prior to 1925 remains unknown.

<sup>47</sup>James Alexander wrote this description of the Wyatt schoolhouse for this report. Alexander's analysis is based upon Fletcher B. Dresslar, *Rural School Houses and Grounds*, United States Bureau of Education Bulletin 12, 1914. James Alexander, *Architectural Description of the Wyatt School*, typescript, n.p., 1994.

<sup>48</sup>All directional references in this description of an early 20th century schoolhouse refer to the original siting of the Wyatt School building. The schoolhouse was moved in 1990. The current orientation of the building on its present site has shifted these directions 180 degrees.

While this schoolhouse did not include the separate teacher's room or workroom that Dresslar recommended for one-teacher schoolhouses, it did include an elevated stage 7'6" deep and one riser high, extending the full width of the north end of the building. This raised stage area identified the front of the classroom, defined the teacher's work area, and provided a location for the special activities of the school. This north wall was devoid of any fenestration to eliminate glare that might limit a student's view of the information written on the blackboard that extended across the entire wall.

The interior of the building was simple, yet beautiful, as Dresslar suggests it should be. The wainscoting of the interior walls, up to the level of the main window sills, together with the crown molding and picture molding added a darker toned horizontality to the originally light colored interior walls.<sup>49</sup> These elements increased the visual scale of the interior and helped create a home-like character to the space.

In 1925 the church association that built and operated the school deeded the one-teacher school to the State of Alabama and the Walker County School Board. In return for donation of the school to the state, the local church group expected the state to construct additional classrooms at the site.<sup>50</sup> The state did provide teachers and textbooks, but maintained Wyatt as a one-teacher operation.<sup>51</sup>

Former Wyatt student John Lewis Parker described what the schoolhouse looked like in the 1930s. Outside it was painted white. Inside "the bottom" (the wainscot) was black; the wall above, a medium green. Blackboards extended the length of the front wall and on the east side wall to the back window. Books were in a case at the rear. Desks

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<sup>49</sup>A review of photographs of other schoolhouse interiors published in *Dora Centennial* and other Walker County historical publications indicate interior schoolhouses in other Walker County schools were painted white. No paint analysis has yet been conducted to determine if a white paint or wash was used at Wyatt.

<sup>50</sup>Walker County Young Ministers Christian Association to the State of Alabama, 23 May 1925. Signatories to the deed to the state were W. M. Williams, association moderator, and W. M. Coaley, secretary; John Lewis Parker, Interview, 19 November 1994.

<sup>51</sup>Future research might explore records of the state educational system. Remaining Walker County records begin in 1932.

were arranged in six rows running front to back with first graders closest to the side blackboard. The ABC's and numbers 1-100 were written on this blackboard. Water was fetched from Coley's Well located about three blocks away until the late 1930s when the county drilled a well at the school. Electricity, four lights on strings down the center of the schoolroom, came in the 1940s. The "old timey," outside toilets remained in use until the school closed. To use these facilities, one would request to: "Go be excused... (but) a boy could not go if a girl was out."<sup>52</sup>

The Walker County Board of Education closed Wyatt School on July 1, 1964 and transferred its students and teacher to T.S. Boyd School in Dora.<sup>53</sup> While the board sold other colored schools, the board wanted to "keep the Wyatt School and sell the land if a clear title could be given."<sup>54</sup> One year later, however, the board requested that the State of Alabama deed the Wyatt property to the board and in turn the board would deed the property to the trustees of the church in that community. On October 14, 1965 the board did deed the Wyatt School to the Walker County 6 Point Association, the successor association to the Walker County Young Minister's Baptist Christian Association.<sup>55</sup>

During the 1960s the abandoned schoolhouse took on a new role as a popular night spot open on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings from nine until the wee hours. To rehabilitate the building for its new use, a new roof was put on and a floor applied over the original surface. The wainscot was painted black, the walls purple and green, and strobe lights rigged. Live bands came from Birmingham and Shelby County and played "good and loud music" to an estimated 125 patrons each night.<sup>56</sup> According to an area

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<sup>52</sup>John Lewis Parker, Interview, 19 November 1994.

<sup>53</sup>Walker County Board of Education, *Minute Book 3*, 1 July 1964, 46.

<sup>54</sup>The Dora Colored School sold for \$279.00, the highest bid paid in cash. Walker County School Board, *Minute Book 3*, 20 November 1964.

<sup>55</sup>Walker County School Board, *Minutes Book 3*, 25 September 1964, 24 September 1965; State of Alabama, *Deed to Real Estate and All Appurtenances*, 900, 14 October 1965, 111.

<sup>56</sup>John Lewis Parker, Interview, 19 November 1994. The 1960s were the era when Black music, long excluded from America's recording mainstream, first made it big. A barrage of smash hits from musical groups recording in Detroit's Hitsville neighborhood added a new word to the dictionary of American music: "Motown"...

resident, the cars were parked all over the hillside and it was a lively scene at the old schoolhouse. This use was discontinued sometime in the 1970s.

As the years passed, the site became overgrown and the physical condition of the schoolhouse deteriorated. The church group considered using the school site for a cemetery and the building for storage. Richard Lovelady, acting for the Alabama Mining Museum, and John Lewis Parker, representing the members of the association that owned the school, worked out the agreements that led to the moving of the structure to the Alabama Mining Museum grounds.<sup>57</sup>

It was Christmas eve of 1989, Richard Lovelady recalled, John Lewis Parker called to say the association had "decided to give it to us. The thing was about to fall down. We questioned whether we could move it." Explaining why he undertook the move and restoration of the dilapidated building, Lovelady, a lifelong resident of the Wyatt-Burnwell community who had walked by the schoolhouse everyday on his way to attend the white school at the bottom of the hill, responded: "I'm just an old fogie who likes to save things...I was family with it."<sup>58</sup>

In the summer of 1990 the Walker County 6 Point Association formally deeded the schoolhouse to the Alabama Mining Museum for \$500.00. A brace was put on "to hold it straight to allow it to be moved" and the schoolhouse was moved by Guthrie House Moving of Nauvoo, Alabama. Ray Roberts, a carpenter who works part-time for the museum, "did the work" to restore and open it for general public use.

Today the Rev. James Dimbo leads the Walker County 6 Point Association which includes the Shiloh Church and other churches in Jefferson and Walker Counties. This

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for Motor City, Detroit. Singing groups including the Supremes and the Temptations climbed to the top of the national pop music charts. Members of the Temptations and other popular Hitsville groups came from Birmingham's industrial communities where these musical traditions also flourished and afforded avenues of upward mobility to talented performers. Marian Smith Holmes. "Who could resist the kind of music they made at Hitsville?" In *Smithsonian*. September, 1994, 83-94; Earl Hilliard, Interview with George McDaniel and Marjorie White for the Birmingham Historical Society's Pratt City National Register of Historic Places Study, Birmingham Historical Society Files, Birmingham, AL, 1986.

<sup>57</sup>John Lewis Parker, Interview, 19 November 1994; Richard Lovelady, Interview, 10 November 1994.

<sup>58</sup>Richard Lovelady, Interview, 19 November 1994.

organization retains title to the land on which the school was located.<sup>59</sup>

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General statement:

1. Architectural character: Wyatt school is an example of a once-typical early 20th century schoolhouse. A low pitched side-gabled roof covers the one-story frame building. Decorative triangular braces mark the center and edges of the front and rear roof overhangs. Two sets of wooden staircases, called "steps" by the local residents, provide access to the front and rear of the schoolhouse. The interior contains a 6' x 6' entrance foyer, a 6' x 24' cloakroom, and a 31' x 24' classroom space with a 7' 6" deep, raised stage area and a blackboard extending the full length of the south (front) interior wall.
2. Condition of fabric: good

B. Description of exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The schoolhouse is approximately 37' x 24' and 21' tall.
2. Foundation: The entire structure is elevated above the ground plane on 16 brick piers set in three rows. At the existing site, the north end of the schoolhouse is 16" above the ground plane and the south end is 28" above ground plans.
3. Walls: The exterior of the rectangular building is covered by 4" horizontal siding, called "lapboard."
4. Structural systems, framing: wood frame
5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: A transom is located above the original entrance. Both that door and transom are covered by a shed roof on triangular brackets to provide entrance protection from rain run off from the unguttered roof above. During the late 1960s

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<sup>59</sup>Richard Lovelady, *History of the Wyatt School*, Typescript, Alabama Mining Museum, 1990; Walker County 6 Point Association to the Alabama Mining Museum Deed, 11 July 1990; *Walker County Tax Assessors Map*, Walker County Tax Assessor Office, Courthouse, Jasper, AL, 1994; Rev. James Dimbo, Telephone Interview with author, 9 November 1994.

or 1970s, when the school building was used as a popular spot for evening entertainment, a second exterior door was cut and second set of steps constructed on the northern end of this schoolhouse.<sup>60</sup>

- b. Windows and shutters: The current east facing wall includes five connected, double hung windows designed for natural light, ventilation, and with the practical advantage that the single teacher could keep an eye on the playyard originally located just outside this window. The west wall contains a single small window placed for cross ventilation. An enclosed brick chimney is located within the interior wall that separates the classroom space from the cloakroom.

6. Roof:

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. No floor plans are known to exist. Interior has been restored.
- 2. Flooring:
- 3. Wall and ceiling finish: Interior walls are covered with a tongue-in-grove lumber up to the level of the main window sills and also above the chairrail on all the other walls. The ceiling is made of the same tongue-in-grove lumber. Baseboards, casements, and other architectural detailing are made of standard lumber sections. The materials to build the school came from the Jack Boyd Residence located in the nearby community of Drummond Switch previous to the construction of the school building.<sup>61</sup>
- 4. Mechanical equipment: Heating and air-conditioning vents, now located in the stage floor, and the heat pump located at the northern end of the school exterior, were added in 1994.

- D. Site: The school was originally located on a 15-acre site accessed by a gravel road which led from the community of Wyatt-Burnwell to Dora. From this road a path led past a well to the schoolhouse steps. To the rear of

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<sup>60</sup>Dorothy Jordan Smith, Interview with author, 24 September 1994.

<sup>61</sup>This description is based upon James Alexander's *Architectural Description of the Wyatt School*.

the school house were two two-stall toilets. One of the toilets and the foundations of the other toilet remain at the original schoolhouse site. The toilets had neither electricity nor running water or modern plumbing fixtures.

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#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This Birmingham District recording project documenting the Wyatt School is part of the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a program to document historically significant architectural, engineering, and industrial heritage in the United States.

This project was undertaken during fall 1994 and early 1995 by the Birmingham Historical Society in cooperation with the Auburn University Center for Architecture and Urban Studies and the Alabama Mining Museum. The field work, measured drawings, historical report, and photographs were prepared under the direction of Richard Anderson, James Alexander, and Marjorie White. The recording team included Joseph Bradley, Tae Kim, Aimee McCormick, and Cameron Parsons, students in the fall studio under the direction of Frank Setzer and Dale Cligner. Auburn University architectural senior Jason Fondren inked the final drawing. Marjorie White, with the research assistance of Brenda Howell, Marjorie Lee White, and Susan Atkinson, wrote the history. James Alexander contributed to the architectural description. Large format photography was done by Jet Lowe, HAER.

The recording team is deeply grateful to Richard Lovelady and others at the Alabama Mining Museum for "saving" the historic school house and the records and reminiscences that tell its story; to Corene Davenport Jordan; Dorothy Jordan Smith; Dorothy Davenport Pope; John Lewis Parker; Gladys Alexander, Rev. Wilson Fallin, and Rev. James Dimbo for granting oral interviews; to Meggett Lavin, heritage education professional currently with the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Drayton Hall, Charleston for conducting a Needs Assessment Study of the Alabama Mining Museum in 1993 and conceiving and encouraging this research; to Lillie Fincher, Curriculum Specialist, and the Birmingham school system administrators and filming crew including Wayne Gibbs, Tom Arledge, Henry Nance, Leon Butler, Zac Sims, Eric Hale for making a 30-minute special on the schoolhouse and Mrs. Jordan; to the Walker County Board of Education Assistant Superintendent, Larry Banks, and Carol Bruce for assistance with school board records; and to Eddie Key, Director, and the Alabama Mining Museum staff and volunteers including Bonnie Groves, Yerby Auxford, Florence Wiley, and Mildred Moon for hosting and supporting the team and the project.